



## Municipal Planning Comparison Project Executive Summary Georgian Bay Association | December 2022

**GBA reviewed and compared the Strategic Plans (SP), Official Plans (OP) and Comprehensive Zoning Bylaws (CZB) of the five municipalities where Georgian Bay Association members reside (the “GBA Area”) as of December 2022.**

The Municipalities are listed alphabetically below:

Township of the Archipelago (TOA)

Township of Carling (TOC)

Township of Georgian Bay (TGB)

Town of Northeastern Manitoulin and the Islands (NEMI)

Municipality of Killarney (MOK)

(collectively, the “Coastal Municipalities”)

**The ultimate goal of the project is to identify potential changes to regulations that would improve coastal protections in the GBA Area.**

## **GBA's Definition of Coastal Protection**

Protection of the natural environment, biodiversity, water quality and ecology of the lands and waters of the eastern and northern coasts of Georgian Bay for the benefit of the public, by promoting and defending sound planning standards, and protecting the integrity of municipal planning regulations, in order to ensure that development is sustainable and environmentally responsible.

## **Purpose & Goals**

GBA understands that the regulations in each municipality vary according to population, geographic features, historical development, and demographics. Additionally, we did not include site specific policies or community plans due to the scope of the project. This collaborative project took around one year to complete and drew on publicly available information with significant assistance from staff at the Coastal Municipalities.

The purpose of the Municipal Planning Comparisons Project (MPCP) is to:

- Identify where planning regulations align or differ;
- Share key findings from the review and comparison; and
- Provide commentary on how coastal protection could be enhanced.

The goals of the MPCP are to:

- Initiate discussions and action among the coastal municipalities aimed at improving coastal protection through positive changes to planning regulations.
- Identify opportunities to increase harmonization of planning regulations, where considered beneficial for a given municipality.
- Share concerns about increased development pressures.

## **Key Findings & Commentary**

Through the review, the project has produced several key findings, summarized below:

### ***Waterfront Residential***

Lot specifications (minimum lot/island area, frontages, coverages and setbacks) vary significantly and there is a lack of clarity and consistency regarding additional dwellings and shoreline structures (cabins, boathouses, docks etc.) and their permitted uses. These policies would benefit from a clear and consistent strategy to balance the maximizing of environmental protections with the needs of property owners for sufficient living space and facilities/services.

If such a strategy is not in place, then concerns arise around:

- Potential over-development from additional dwellings, facilities, services and shoreline structures;
- Increased stress on existing services (specifically septic systems); and
- Potential impacts on the natural shoreline, sightlines of neighbours, species at risk and other sensitive habitat, and water quality.

The projected increase in water levels variability also suggests that a review of high-water marks and setbacks would be prudent, particularly for septic systems. Changes to high-water marks and setbacks will affect these policies.

### ***Waterfront Commercial***

Lot specifications, lot/island area, frontage, and setbacks, vary among the coastal area municipalities and there is a lack of clarity on permitted uses in waterfront commercial designations between islands and mainland.

Provided there is minimal adverse impact on the environment, consideration could be given to more flexible regulations for marinas, resorts and tourist operations to enable them to operate when water levels are extremely high or low.

### ***Environmental Protection and Open Space:***

There is a lack of clarity on the differences between natural state and open space, and permitted uses and structures varied significantly.

Consideration could be given to adopting similar terminology and permitted uses among the five municipalities.

### ***Lot subdivisions***

Coastal protection could be improved by applying more restrictive regulations (than apply under the Ontario Planning Act) and inclusion of specific wetland and natural heritage areas policies for lot subdivision applications.

### ***Blasting and dredging***

Blasting and dredging can be an important tool to allow for water access in periods of extreme low water levels, particularly for marinas. Consideration could be given to developing clear and consistent site alteration by-laws on land modification using blasting and dredging to balance such needs with ensuring environmental protections are maintained.

## **Intent**

GBA is not making recommendations but rather providing commentary on the findings through the lens of coastal protection. However, highlighting differences will enable municipalities and communities to see how others regulate certain planning matters, which could lead to discussions among the Coastal Municipalities on a more consistent approach that draws on the sound practices identified by the project.